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Ensuring the People Take Part

Citizenship and the Power to Act in Working Class Areas

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Do we really want the populations of lower-income areas to make their voices heard? This book shows that the so-called apathy of low-income residents is not what it seems, or rather that it arises from specific interactional contexts.

In theory and practice alike, two analyses clash when it comes to how residents take part in shaping policy in the cities where they live. The first highlights the failings of the "participatory injunction," a demand made unilaterally, even contemptuously, upon the underprivileged to fulfill their duty as citizens while making no room for their opinions on how well their institutions are serving them. The second takes an opposite tack, seeing in their participation a lever for their social and political emancipation, and a chance to improve the power of public action. The intersection of several perspectives on analysis and field work in this book will help readers move beyond this binary vision toward an understanding of how social, economic, and urban issues are debated in the public space.
